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EDITORS' TABLE.

EDITORS: A. S. PACKARD AND E. D. COPE.

— The relations of the National Academy of Sciences to the Government deserve the attention of the scientific men of the country. There are two views of the nature and functions of this body. One of these is, that it is the advisor of the Government in such matters as come within its scope. As it is most likely to be called upon for opinions in questions of applied science, it follows that a considerable number of its members should represent that kind of ability, rather than advanced positions in original research in pure science. The other view is, that the academy is a body which includes a definite number of men who lead the progress of pure science in the country, irrespective of utility to the Government, and that as such, its membership constitutes an order of merit which is the highest within reach of the American scientist. From this standpoint its relations to the Government flow simply from the character of its membership, and not from any especial modification of its organization.

There is no reason why the two propositions above stated may not both be realized in the academy. This is doubtless the opinion of the large majority of its members, and indeed represents the actual state of affairs in that body. It is, nevertheless, easily seen that however combined, the two ideas are themselves distinct, and that care will always have to be exercised to preserve a just equilibrium between them. The fact that a large proportion of its members are in the employ of Government bureaus can excite no adverse criticism, and is indeed a necessary consequence of the large number of experts required for the Government service. But the academy must be protected against possible consequences of this fact.

In the interval between the annual meetings of 1884 and 1885, two members of a committee appointed to investigate a question affecting one of the bureaus of which they themselves are employees, were requested to resign from the committee by the chief of the bureau in question. This was in obedience to the rule that a department of the Government cannot be criticised by its subordinates. It requires no argument to show that if this rule be carried out with reference to the Academy of Sciences its usefulness as an independent body is at an end. There is also

another danger which flows directly from the same or a similar attitude on the part of heads of bureaus. These gentlemen, by filling up the academy with their employees can obtain practical control of its decisions. This would be immensely convenient to them under various circumstances, but it would introduce an element of corruption into the academy from which it has been hitherto happily free, and which would deprive it of the respect and confidence of the country. So long as the bureaus remain under the direction of their present heads, such contingency is remote; but changes for various reasons, political or otherwise, are by no means impossible. It is easier to provide against possible evils than to reform them when they are upon us.

— The papers read at the late meeting of the National Academy of Sciences include several of first-class importance in systematic analysis. Such is the paper of Mr. Scudder on the palæozoic insects, and such that of Dr. Sterry Hunt on the classification of the natural silicates. Of the same character was the paper of Professor Gill on the orders of fishes; and to the same class belongs that of Professor Cope on the phylogeny of the placental Mammalia. These memoirs, if published in extenso in the next volume of the memoirs of the National Academy, will give it a value commensurate with the place the society holds among those of the country. Of almost equal but less comprehensive importance were the three papers read by Professor Packard on Palæozoic Crustacea, and by Professor Cope on the Pretertiary Vertebrata of Brazil. The papers in other departments were less important than is sometimes the case at the meetings of the academy.

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RECENT LITERATURE.

HAND-BOOK OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN FOREST ENTOMOLOGY.¹— This promises to be a valuable contribution to forest entomology, especially as a text book in a school of forestry. This first part, now before us, is general in its nature, containing a brief biography of Ratzeburg, the leading authority on forest entomology, with a portrait; this is succeeded by chapters on the following subjects: The external form of adult insects; the internal structure of adult insects; reproduction and metamorphoses of insects; insects as natural and economic forces; the causes and remedies against destructive insects, and the economic compensations of the more extensive losses from the depredations of insects; general introduction to systematic and practical entomology.

¹ *Lehrbuch der Mitteleuropäischen Forstinsektenkunde, mit einem Anhang: Die forstschädlichen Wirbelthiere.* Als achte Auflage von Dr. J. T. C. RATZEBURG Die Walaverderber und ihre Feinde. In vollständiger Umarbeitung herausgegeben von Dr. J. F. JUDEICH und Dr. H. NITSCHKE. I. Abtheilung, Ratzeburg's Leben, Einleitung, Allgemeiner Theil. Wien., E. Hölzel, 1885, 8vo., pp. 264.